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TITLE ON BABYLONIAN-ASSYRIAN CULTURE. II.

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RELIGION, MYTHOLOGY AND DOCTRINE.

Apart from the language, the most striking proof of the unity of the Babylonians and Assyrians is their religion. Both pray in general to the same great gods, they have the same religious traditions, the same cultus, and apparently the same temple architecture. Even the gods, whom it is reasonable to suppose the Semitic Babylonians borrowed from the old Chaldeans, were honored by the Assyrians and had their temples, centuries old, in Assur and Nineveh. The only Assyrian god not worshiped by the Babylonians was the national god Ašur, whose service ceased entirely with the fall of Nineveh. But all the gods of the Babylonians were holy to the Assyrians. Whenever they came to Babel, either as peacemakers or as conquerors, they were zealous to bring their sacrifices and gifts to the gods of the land. To seize the hands of the great Bêl of Babel or of Deri, was a high ceremonial act which they did not willingly forego. It was for them a higher consecration, as was the sight of Ra at Heliopolis to the Egyptian kings. Some gods of lower rank were not so early known in the northern land; but sooner or later they also found their way thither, and the doctrines of the Assyrian Pantheon were brought by the Assyrian priests more and more into conformity with the doctrines of the Babylonian priestly schools, whose sacred texts the Assyrian kings had copied for their libraries. With all the local differences, there was no idea of distinct religion. When therefore we give the main outlines of the Babylonian religion, we have at the same time presented the belief and cultus of the Assyrian.

Glancing then at the divine world of Babylon, we find at the head of this Pantheon, a triad of chief gods, corresponding to that mentioned by Damascius, Anu, Bêl (the highest Bêl), and the god whose name is commonly written Ea.

ANU.

Anu (Anna or Ana) was formerly god of Uruk (Orchoê, Erech). He had also a temple at Ur and one in the city of Assur. His sanctuaries were found in several places and were named E-Ana, "house of Anna." But though he retained an exalted place in the hierarchy of the gods, he gradually lost his place in the cultus.

According to some he was god of the unseen heavens above the firmament; according to others, of the fixed stars. In the mythic uranography both representations amount to the same thing. His symbol resembles a Maltese cross, representing as it appears the four points of the compass and hence the entire heavens. His bow, which is frequently mentioned, was probably the Milky Way. Bêl and Ea stand beside him in the system, but he is without doubt the highest.

At the deluge all the gods rushed terrified to his heaven, where they sat cowering before the lattice, and even Ištar fled to him for help when repulsed by the hero of the Epos.

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BÊL.

The most ancient center of the worship of Bêl, the lord of the lands, was Nipur. In the mythology he is god of punishment and vengeance, and is exceedingly enraged that some beings are rescued at the deluge. He is only appeased by seeing that pestilence, famine and wild beasts are left, with which to punish sinners. He was called the sword-god and war-god, and as creator of the luminaries had also a celestial character. He needed Ea's assistance to protect his son Sin from Anu, who wished to eclipse him, while into this struggle entered Šamaš, the sun-god, and Ištar, the embodiment of the stars, on Anu's side. The latter was hence the mightiest, while Ea and Bêl stood on a footing of equality.

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EÂ.

Ea was god of the cosmic ocean. He dwelt in the abyss. He was the father of profound wisdom, the instructor and counselor of gods and men, the healer of sickness, the foe of evil spirits. When the deluge was decided upon in the council of the gods, he commanded his true worshiper to build a ship to escape the general ruin. He blamed Bêl for thinking to blot out good and bad alike. Only punishment, he said, not destruction, was deserved. Sennacherib, who did not forget him at the opening of the canals, which he dug to supply Nineveh with drinking water, cast a little golden ship and a golden fish into the ocean as an offering to Ea, when his fleet stood ready to sail to Nagitê. "Bull of the Ocean," he called him. Dagon, the fish-god, is no doubt identical with him. We may believe also that he corresponds to the Oannes of Berossos, the originator of all culture. A hymn in an Old-Chaldaic text describes him as in a boat with his wife and his son Marduk. This boat delights the heart "at break of day." It is the sun-boat sailing over the celestial ocean like the ship of the Egyptian Ra. He thus originally belonged to a group of light-gods, whose myth arose among a people of fishers and seafarers. Further, he was evidently also the god of creation. In a famous hymn the fire-god Gibil is endowed with attributes similar to Ea's. He was, hence, essentially the same, and the latter, therefore, found his most brilliant manifestation in the sun, which traverses the celestial seas.

We find, then, in historic times a system of three mighty gods: Anu, who is throned in the highest heavens; Bêl, the stern god of death, the punisher and avenger, and Ea, the benignant god, granting life and all life's blessings.

Each of these gods has his spouse beside him. Antuni, the wife of Anu, is the mother-goddess. She is sometimes identified with Ištar, and her realm is the starry heaven. Belit is the wife of Bêl and goddess of the underworld. She is sometimes called Allat, and is as terrible as her lord. Davkina, the Dankê of Damascius, is the wife of Ea, mistress of the earth, but like her husband bearing some relation to the waters.

The distinctions between the goddesses are not sharply defined. The attributes of the great gods are likewise interchangeable, and there are several interesting inscriptions which plainly indicate that Anu, Bêl and Ea were but different names for the supreme divinity. We are also justified in the conjecture that the

mythological system of Babel was the result of the merging of various local systems, in which Anu, Bêl and Êa were respectively the highest gods. Êa was undoubtedly originally non-Semitic; Bêl, on the other hand, Semitic. While Anu's nationality is in doubt, his name may be a translation of *The* and he himself a union of the chief god of the primitive inhabitants with the chief god of the Semites.

The triad of the highest gods is followed by a second, the members of which are generally considered sons of the first. Sin, the son of Bêl; Šamaš, of Êa; and Rammân, of Anu.

SIN.

Sin, the moon-god, the Old-Chaldaic Agû, was a deity highly revered, after whom Sargon I. named his son. In Ur, though not a god of the highest rank, he received through various dynasties supreme honors, probably because he was the local god of the capital. In Harran also, he had an old temple. The mythology assigns him merely a subordinate or even a passive rôle, but his worshipers exalt him as lord and judge of heaven and earth from whose decision there is no appeal.

ŠAMAŠ.

The sun-god, Šamaš, bore this name among the Semites, but was worshiped among the old Chaldeans under the name Bab-bara. The poets extol him as "the light-bearer of the wide heavenly spaces, to whom the gods look up, and in whom remote people delight themselves." He spreads out the infinity of heaven like a covering over the earth; he drives away evil spirits; he is protector of the laws, avenger of justice, and, like the Persian Mithra, he abhors every lie. As the unseen Light-god, throned in the highest heavens, he was called Malik, the king. Sippar, the double city, was sacred to him under this name, and also to his spouse Malkat, who appears as Venus, the morning star. He cannot always be distinguished from Adar, god of the sun-glow. He is called the servant and confidant of Anu and Bêl, the mediator between men and the highest gods. From his visible manifestation in the daily motions of the sun, the idea of service would naturally be suggested to his worshipers.

RAMMÂN.

The wind-and-weather-god next follows, whom the old Chaldeans call Mir-mir, the Semites Rammân. Without doubt he was Rimmon or Dâdu of the Arameans. He is god of all the fierce elemental forces, and the evil spirits fight on his side. Among the Assyrians the terrible side of his nature stood in the foreground; they entreated him to use his destructive power against their enemies. But to the Babylonians he was more often the god of blessing.

Little can be said of the spouses of these gods. Anûnit, however, the wife of Šamaš, is one of the numerous forms of the celebrated Ištar.

ISHTAR.

This deity is at the same time the best known and the least known of the goddesses of the Babylonian Pantheon. She was called 'Aštoret among the Phœnicians; her worship extended over Western Asia, and in Egypt she had a

relative in *Haṭhor*. She is known under two forms. As a stern and warlike goddess, she had her chief seats at *Arbela*, *Aganê* and *Larsa*. As the voluptuous and fruitful mother, she had temples at *Uruk* and *Nineveh*. But we know that these forms were not always sharply distinguished. As the mother she laments at the deluge for "her people" who have been annihilated. In her journey to *Hades* she appears as the mother in the most comprehensive sense, for when she is imprisoned there, all production ceases; but a warlike character appears when she threatens to break down the doors of the lower world and free the dead, unless they release her. The plural form of her name denotes all the goddesses in general. Here our uncertainty begins. This last fact would lead us to think that the name referred to no one particular goddess, still more since *Ištar* is called indifferently daughter of *Anu*, *Ašur* or *Sin*. We can probably safely distinguish at least two *Ištars*, one the mother, unwedded, the queen, first-born of all the gods, who exercised a certain dominion over the others, a mythological conception only possible among a people where the matriarchate prevailed; the other, a goddess better suited to the Semitic system, of lower rank, and worshiped by the side of her husband.

ADAR AND NERGAL.

These gods presided over war and the chase. Their attributes and characters are much the same. Both are represented as lion and bull colossi with human heads. *Nergal's* outward manifestation was the planet *Mars*. *Adar* was worshiped also in *Elam*. Being eldest son of *Ēa*, he was prince of the gods. He belonged to the circle of light-gods, and partook of many of his father's characteristics. He presided over the arts and protected mankind from evil spirits. But he had another side; as the god of the glowing sun he was death-dealing. The destroying angel, *Dibbara*, was one of his forms.

MARUDUK.

When *Babel* had become the great capital of a mighty empire and even after its decadence, *Maruduk* and the closely related *Nabû* of *Borsippa* were exalted to the highest rank; yet in *Assyria* it was not till long after *Tiglath-pileser I.* that *Maruduk* was accepted as one of the highest gods. He received the title *Bêl bêli*, and in a hymn to him we read, "Thy will is the highest command for heaven and earth." But it was the glory of his city *Babel* which so exalted him. He was a son of *Ēa*, a great warrior and hunter. The lightning was his weapon, and with his dogs, the four winds, he fought the powers of darkness. Hence he was a beneficent god, terrible only to the evil. Old hymns represent him as the mediator between men and his father, *Ēa*. He had a famous oracle at *Babel*. *Zarpanitû*, at *Babel*, was called his spouse, though elsewhere, the wife of *Nabû*. She had many of the attributes of *Hêra-Eileithyia*, and presided at births.

NABU.

This god, at first, perhaps, identical with *Maruduk*, was afterwards counted as his son. *Nabû* was the one who granted to kings the scepter of dominion for the government of all lands. He was the god of revelation and inspiration, (*ilu tašmetu*), the tutelar divinity of scribes, priests and learned men. He was probably a fire-god, and his symbol *Mercury*, the morning star.

V
ASUR.

At the head of the Assyrian Pantheon stood Ašur, god of war and the chase, father of the gods. His name is often written An-šur, perhaps meaning "the good." We can no longer see in him the characteristics of a nature god, though a well known divinity may be concealed under his name. With the fall of the Assyrian Empire he vanished from the cultus.

We have now treated in outline the most prominent gods of Babylonia and Assyria, but our present knowledge does not justify us in separating between what was peculiar to the Semitic races and what was borrowed from the old Chaldeans, or in more wide-reaching conclusions than we have here and there indicated. We know the Semites of Babel and Assur were polytheists, and where there is polytheism there is mythology. But the sagas and tales of their mythology serve as mediums for ethical thoughts or primitive histories. The battle of Maruduk against the she-dragon Tiamat is similar in many ways to the story of Indra in the Rig-Veda, to that of Perseus, of Thor, of St. Michael and St. George. It also stands related to the battle of the evil spirits with the moon-god Sin, in which an eclipse is represented. The myth of the destroying angel Dibbara, the god of pestilence, is doubtless the story of a fearful plague which visited southern Babylonia, Elam and the western country. Ištar's descent into Hades is doubtless a nature myth, describing in an animated way the search for the sources of living water. When she is set free and returns to the upper world she calls her dead lover Dumuzi (Tammuz) back to life by bathing him with the water of immortality. This myth is anthropomorphic rather than cosmogonic, and while often obscure, it was intended to strengthen the belief in immortality. The deluge story we possess in various forms, all plainly polytheistic and proceeding from a nature myth. There is a certain naïve humor in the representation of the gods, an air of genial familiarity among them. Ištar complains that she has borne men, but no fish brood; Êa justifies himself against Bêl for rescuing his favorite; Bêl is rebuked for his vengeful passion, and Ištar refuses him any share in the sacrifices. Bêl silently recognizes his wrong and makes amends by exalting among the gods the man whose rescue had so enraged him. It is plain that the story-teller has used the myths to picture the destruction of a sinful humanity, and to show that evil-doers will still be punished with hunger, pestilence and wild beasts. In Berossos' story Kronos, i. e. Bêl, rescues Xisuthros, but the chief purpose here is to recount the rescue of the sacred books. A nature myth probably lies at the foundation of the so-called Epos, of which the deluge story is but an episode. The hero of this, who has with reason been compared to Nimrod, the great hunter, with a similarity also to Samson, and to Herakles, was certainly a god and not a king. His battle against the Elamite king, Humbaba, against Ištar, queen of Uruk, and other tales, are not legendary histories, but localized myths. Many features of the story show that the time of the myths lay far behind the poet.

The Babylonian priests did not reject the myths; they used them for doctrinal purposes. Though we cannot speak authoritatively of a Babylonian system of dogmatics, there are undoubted traces of a theology. We can prove from a number of passages that the Babylonian-Assyrian religion was ruled by theocratic ideas and a belief in the unlimited might of God, only modified by a trust in his justice,

pity and grace. A moral order of the world was an accepted doctrine. The titles of the gods, the ideas of the lower world, the sacred hymns and the care for the dead prove also a belief in a personal immortality.

The universal terms for divinity, God, are the general Semitic words *ilu* and *bêl*,—the first probably expressing majesty; the second, lordship. *Malik*, king, is also used, and for the goddesses *belît*, *bilat* or *Malikat*. *Ilu* is the only universal appellation; and for the goddesses *Ištar*, *ištarâti*. The gods stand high above man and nature, with hardly a trace of immanence. This is a genuine Semitic view, and just as characteristic is it that the stern, destructive gods receive equal honor with the beneficent. Radically different from the tolerant Egyptian custom was the fact that foreign gods were seldom or never admitted to the Pantheon. Gods of other nations might indeed be received to their temples, but they stood there like hostages in the court of a king, and when the conquered people showed signs of complete submission, their gods were readily returned. *Ašur* and his associates remained ever the only true divinities, exalted high above the nature gods around them.

A pure monotheism was, however, never reached. Though the Babylonians and Assyrians often assigned to one god an exalted rank, though they sometimes called one father of the gods of heaven and earth, though they sometimes named the highest gods of Babel and Assur *ilu* or *bêl* and came gradually to accept the view that the gods of the first triad and *Ašur* were essentially the same, yet they never rose to the conception of a transcendent spirit, *Ilû* standing alone and above the highest gods. They were very near monotheism; but they failed to take the last important step, and so, like the Egyptians, remained to the end monarchical polytheists.